

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CELEBRATING 100 YEARS 1916-2016



## **snapshot** Silos+Smokestacks National Heritage Area

"AMISH OATSHOCKS," WILFORD YODER





LEFT SILOS + SMOKESTACKS NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA, RIGHT "CHICKS," MILIND DESHPANDE

# needed. niche

SILOS+SMOKESTACKS NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA FOSTERS A HEARTLAND REVIVAL

## **Silos+Smokestacks National Heritage Area:**

Creates an Integrated Story  
for Visitors to Experience  
Across the Region

Instills a Sense of Ownership  
Among Communities  
and Stakeholders

Builds Local Capacity  
to Deliver a Quality  
Visitor Experience

Encourages Tourism +  
Heritage-Based  
Development

Erases Political +  
Bureaucratic Boundaries  
to Preserve Regional  
Story and Character

Develops Tours, Consistent  
Signage, Visitor Kiosks,  
Exhibits Tailored to  
Place, School Curricula,  
Websites, Brochures

Markets the Heritage Area  
in the Media and  
at High-Profile  
Events

Works Towards a Goal of  
Financial Sustainability by  
Fundraising for Projects  
and Day-to-Day  
Operations



Silos and Smokestacks, like other national heritage areas, “gravitates to fill the most needed niche in the preservation and economic landscape,” according to a congressionally mandated evaluation. The benefits it brings are compelling; over a 10-year period, the area more than matched the \$6.5 mil-

lion investment budgeted through the National Park Service. Coupled with the local match of \$7.7 million, that translates to a significant investment in regional economies, heritage tourism a driver of revitalization. The area, encompassing two-thirds of Iowa’s population across 37 counties in the state’s northeast corner, meets its goals with a mix of grants, technical assistance, educational development, and awareness building, a key goal instilling a preservation ethic among kids. Partnering with local entities has been critical to the success, but dollars do not tell the whole story. “It’s a ripple effect that doesn’t stop at the \$7 million,” says program and partnership director Candy Streed.

Over a hundred partner sites join hands in carrying out the mission—like the Seed Savers Exchange, an 890-acre living sanctuary for thousands of varieties from amaranth to watermelon. In a world whose food supply grows dangerously less diverse, its orchard preserves hundreds of varieties of 19th century apples and more than a hundred breeding lines from the collection of famed grape grower Elmer Swenson. Ancient White Park Cattle—a rare breed that roamed the British Isles before the time of Christ—graze in the brush, fabled in Celtic lore with their lyre-shaped, black-tipped horns. Sparkling streams, limestone bluffs, and century-old white pine woods enhance the visitor draw. At the Fossil and Prairie Park Preserve and Center, pelecypods (clams), gastropods (snails), crinoids (water lilies), and cephalopods (similar to squids) wash out of the soft-shale hills during heavy rain. Caribbean-blue water shimmers in a clay pit of the defunct Rockford Brick & Tile Company, whose old beehive kilns strike a counterpoint to the native prairie landscape.

**Left:** *It is a place of small town charm, where summer days are measured in funnel cake and barbecued ribs and children squeal with laughter at a newborn calf kicking up its heels. The heritage area is the thread for a series of agricultural adventures in the nationally historic farm country.* **Above:** *Newborn chicks.*



**Below, right: Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area is at the forefront of the agritour trend, the prairie fields rich with remnants of the past—and present. Attractions like Living History Farms, a prime partner site just outside Des Moines, capture life as it was in agriculture's halcyon days. A 1900 farm portrays the barn at the vortex of change during the Industrial Revolution, multipurposed for storing crops, stabling animals, milking cattle, and housing modern machinery. The determination of farmers to get their best returns led to momentous innovations in grains and livestock. With advances in refrigeration, transportation, and processing, markets expanded globally, smokestacks peppering the landscape. Today, farming is a multi-billion-dollar, multi-national industry led by companies like John Deere, Quaker Oats, Cargill, and ADM.**



The region's sense of place is grounded in some of the world's most fertile soil, the "black gold" of northeast Iowa, once blanketed with tallgrass. The dense tangle of decaying roots and bulbs produced a rich, dark dirt. In the mid-1800s, John Deere's steel plow, slicing through this mantle, transformed a frontier into a breadbasket almost overnight. Today, the waves of corn and grain still signify beauty and bounty, but the rise of agribusiness signaled a decline in family farming. In 1991, the Kitchen Cabinet Group, an organization convening around farmhouse tables, spearheaded the revitalization of Waterloo, a blue-collar town decimated by the mid-'80s farm crisis. The success spread, and Congress authorized America's Agricultural Heritage Partnership, which created Silos, to preserve the nationally important story. Fredericksburg—the state's dairy capital before seeing its population drop to under a thousand—turned to area staff to develop a nature trail with signs showcasing landscape, barns, and pastures.

The heritage area model, encouraging private and public to pull together, often remedies the "separateness" of government agencies. What begins at the grass roots stays that way, with a sense of ownership that stirs residents, stakeholders, and officials alike. The evaluation points to how much communities value the pairing of assistance with grants. This is especially helpful in distressed rural places without the funds or expertise to bring it all together.

Kids are immersed in a host of transformative experiences—like working on a dairy farm or buffalo ranch—thanks in part to school transportation grants that get them there. The intent is not just preserving a place, but a way of life. The historic Tyden Farm No. 6—originally owned by the mechanical genius Emil Tyden, a Swedish immigrant—is still in use, run by the Pitzenberger family. A massive 40-by-140 foot barn, unheard-of when built, anchors the site. Hansen's Farm Fresh Dairy, winner of the area's Golden Silo Award for Outstanding Preservation in Agriculture, is a leader in the locavore movement, with milk, cheese, ice cream, butter, and eggnog sold at grocery stores, restaurants, and its own Moo Roo retail outlet. All four sons work for the operation, which supports five families. "And the story keeps going," says Streed. The one-of-a-kind Wapsi Mill—seven stories of stone built in 1867—had withstood flood after flood, symbol of how the pioneer character was shaped by surviving the climate's extremes, far from the nearest town. "The community didn't

LEFT ABOVE "BIG BIRD," ROY MOORE; LEFT BELOW "THE BLACKSMITH'S HANDS," JOHN MOYERS; LIVING HISTORY FARMS; RIGHT "SNACK TIME," DEIDRE FUDGE; LIVING HISTORY FARMS







**\$7.7 million**  
IN LOCAL MATCH  
MONIES SEED BY  
\$6.5 MILLION IN  
NPS FUNDS OVER A  
10-YEAR  
PERIOD

**Match  
Sources:**  
BUSINESSES  
DONATIONS  
GRANTS  
COMMUNITIES  
ORGANIZATIONS

know what to do with it,” Streed says. A feasibility study offered options, and now the mill is a museum, all the work done by volunteers. Silos built a community toolbox, including access to grants for developing marketing strategies. Similar standout partners are the Wagaman Mill and Museum (above), a beloved landmark whose restoration turns back the pages of time; and the Motor Mill, whose rebirth has likewise stirred community passions. Across the heritage area, interns from college kids to grandmothers learn tourism at places like these, which never had such assistance before. The goal is to retain them with a paying job that puts their training to use.

“From the start, NPS has been integral to helping staff partner with communities, determining what the story lines should be,” says Silos president Don Short. Despite some initial skepticism about the farm experience as asset, Silos is now at the forefront of the agritourism trend. A rejuvenated 1870s grange hall—framed by rolling hills—is at the center of Newton’s Sugar Grove Vineyards and Gathering Place, a stop on Silos’ Vineyards and Wineries Tour that recalls when farmers banded together to control their own destinies. The Dubuque and Maquoketa Tour features the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, housed in an old shipbuilding factory, a world-class venue with exhibits, a boatyard, wetlands, and a cafe in a refurbished Chicago, Burlington & Quincy train depot. A nostalgia for bygone days permeates Dyersville’s National Farm Toy Museum, on the Gear Head Tour, which boasts 30,000 to-scale artifacts from a small tractor with a farmer cast in the driver’s seat to a diminutive Roy Rogers on Trigger and Dale Evans on Buttermilk.

LEFT “WAGAMAN MILL,” SCOTT FAIRBAIN; RIGHT “JANUARY FROST,” JULIE KURTH



There are many like destinations on the Silos website, which boasts half a million visitors annually, its Camp Silos component key to reaching youth. Helping carry out the mission are Herbert Hoover National Historic Site and Effigy Mounds National Monument, which co-hosted a five-day teacher workshop.

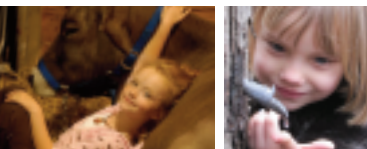
It’s a profoundly American place, worth preserving. During the presidential caucuses, the candidates themselves step into the tableau. With an events schedule from the *Des Moines Register*, it’s possible to catch three or four hopefuls a day at the iconic places Silos strives to preserve, talking to reporters on small-town street corners, giving speeches at town halls. And as they fan out across farm country, they witness the reawakening at the very heart of the heritage area. They can overnight at the Farm House B&B, working off a full-course farmer’s breakfast of local fare by milking cows, feeding baby calves, and walking, running, or biking the 5-mile nature trail. Or sample a host of venues in downtown Waterloo, which has gone from boarded-up ghost town to restaurant-rich. The Screaming Eagle Bar and Grill—ensconced in an 1887 building once home to a wholesale grocer—now serves up tasty food with Harley charm, walls replete with motorcycle paraphernalia. Upstairs are the heritage area offices, right on the pulse of the transformation.

*Above: In national heritage areas like Silos and Smokestacks, much of the value is not reflected in the economic benefit but in the inherent impact of “preserving the beauty of a region,” according to a congressionally mandated evaluation. Silos preserves a place seemingly untouched by time, its historic communities and farmsteads tucked away in rolling hills and gentle valleys.*

**Benefits:**  
PROTECTS HERITAGE  
BOOSTS ECONOMIES  
HELPS COMMUNITIES

**108**  
SITES DESIGNATED  
AS PARTNERS





ABOVE SILOS + SMOKESTACKS NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA, BELOW HANSEN'S FARM FRESH DAIRY, HUDSON, IA

***Above and right:***  
*Youth camps, developed by Silos and Smokestacks, immerse kids in the nationally significant legacy of this profoundly American place, at the forefront of the agritourism trend thanks to a modest federal investment.*

